Chapter 12

Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi Temple: Local Art in Upper Myanmar 11th–17th Centuries AD

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Abstract

The article explores the relationship of a local tradition of nine Shwe-gu or “golden caves” and the 11 khayaing of Kyaukse, the rice fields that supplied Bagan. Drawing on survey and ongoing work at the Ta Mok khayaing Shwe-gu-gyi, we profile a local specificity essential to and yet far from the courts of 11th–17th century Bagan, Pinya and Inwa. In its multiple encasements of images and architecture, the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi records a transition from the visual complexity of Bagan period gu to the more iconic structures of the Pinya and Inwa eras.

Introduction

Rice in ancient Bagan was more than agriculture. The extent and yields of the Kyaukse rice-fields khayaing explain administration and granary production but without the Shwe-gu oral tradition (pa-sat-yazawin), we argue that the story is incomplete [Fig. 12.1]. The khayaing granaries were founded by Anawrahta (AD 1044–1077) to supply Bagan but remained essential for the 14th–15th century AD court at Pinya, 16th–17th century AD Inwa and 18th–19th century AD Mandalay. This longevity is obvious in the temple architecture but rarely mentioned in the economic and administrative documentation of the rice-fields of the 11 khayaing [Win Maung (Tampawaddy) 2000; Berliet 2008a]. The stupas and temples, however, marked out artistic, social and religious routes, and annual festival and pilgrimage circuits for local farmers [Burma Gazetteer 1925: 14; Cooley 1969 (1894): 42; Hendrickson 2007].

Kyaukse Traditions and Rice

The khayaing guarded Bagan’s prosperity and trade eastward, a union of economic and territorial aims seen in other land-based empires of this era (Hendrickson 2011). Given the inland location of the capital from the 13th to late 19th century with rice a dietary staple and common barter good, it had much greater significance than just its economic value, with export during this period virtually non-existent (Siok-Hwa 1968: 2; Berliet 2008b: 195). Further, rice was stored at the capital in great quantities to protect against rebellion and siege from areas such as Kyaukse (Harvey 1925: 146). Many definitions of the khayaing by-pass this spatial hierarchy and neutrally label them a district or administrative unit or put Kyaukse on the outer limits of the urban and administrative nucleus (Aung-Thwin 1985: 100; Myanmar Language
Commission 1993: 54). Luce, closer to the local emphasis of this article, called the *khayaing* central points upon which other parts depend (1959: 41).

As noted above, the *khayaing* are generally dated to the reign of Anawrahta, with the 19th century *Kokhayaing Thamaing* recounting legends, administration and the many temples, statues, monasteries and ordination halls installed by the king (Brac de la Perrière 1989: 47, 338–41). They were expanded by Alaungsithu (r. AD 1113–1167) and codified into a complex administration system for the dams and
canals by Narapatisithu within three years of surmounting the throne (Yin Myo Thu 2011: 6). Widespread change in the organization of the country at this time also included the founding of 43 fortresses along the eastern border of the empire (Berliet 2008a: 203; 2011). Kyaukse management brought the construction of forts for collection of rice, seeking control of the fertile plain (21°17′–21°47′N, 96°01′–96°10′E). The meandering course of the Kyaukse canals made effective use of the gentle southeast to north slope of the plain and provided essential augmentation of the scarce local rainfall (784mm per annum) (Burma Gazetteer 1925: 5, 13). The rice-fields of the khayaing also appear to have subsumed the Shwe-gu tradition for all the Pan Laung khayaing (Kan lu, Ta Mok, Pa nan, Myin gon daing, Ya Mon, Myit tha, Pyi-mana) enclose one to two Shwe-gu (Wun pate and Saw ye Shwe-gu at Kan lu, Ta Mok Shwe-gu at Ta Mok, Pa nan and Ma gyi daw Shwe-gu at Pa nan, Kyet ma Shwe-gu at Myin gon daing, Shwe inn Shwe-gu at Ywa mon, Kyun hla Shwe-gu at Myit tha, and Shwe ku me Shwe-gu at Pyi ma na). There is no Shwe-gu in the Pin le khayaing, perhaps this is because it lies mid-way between the Samon and Pan Laung rivers.

The khayaing all contain walled “forts”, although opinions differ on the systematic presence of a fortification as walls are not mentioned in the literature. Ernelle Berliet suggests that two khayaing, Met kaya and Myit tha, may also have served as military outposts, and documenting fortified area only at Met kaya, Myin gon daing, Pyi ma na and Pinle, proposes a hierarchy between walled and non-walled khayaing (2008b: 196). In contrast, one of the authors, Win Maung (Tampawaddy), estimates areas for all the forts seen in the chart below. As many of the walls are fragmentary or ruined, the question remains open to debate, but both Ernelle Berliet and Win Maung agree that the primary function of the khayaing was crop production and collection [Table 12.1].

Table 12.1: Panlong Shwe-gu and Khayaing fort size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khayaing</th>
<th>Present village</th>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Shwe-gu</th>
<th>Fort (est. ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pin le</td>
<td>Myo twin</td>
<td>Myit tha</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyi mana</td>
<td>Near Kume</td>
<td>Myit tha</td>
<td>Shwe ku me</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myit tha</td>
<td>Myit tha</td>
<td>Myit tha</td>
<td>Kyun hla</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ywa mon</td>
<td>Near Saba daw</td>
<td>Kyaukse</td>
<td>Shwe inn</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myin gon daing</td>
<td>Myin kyeh daing</td>
<td>Kyaukse</td>
<td>Kyet ma</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa nan</td>
<td>Near Pan kwa</td>
<td>Kyaukse</td>
<td>Panan; Ma gyi daw</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta Mok</td>
<td>Near Nyaung bin zaik</td>
<td>Kyaukse</td>
<td>Ta Mok</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin daung</td>
<td>East of Thin daung</td>
<td>Kyaukse</td>
<td>Zaw gyi River</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met kaya</td>
<td>Ay bya</td>
<td>Hsint kaing</td>
<td>Zaw gyi and Myit ngeh rivers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta bet kar¹</td>
<td>Hsint kaing</td>
<td>Hsint kaing</td>
<td>Myit ngeh River</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kan lu</td>
<td>Kan myuu</td>
<td>Hsint kaing</td>
<td>Wun pate; Saw ye</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ¹ Win Maung (Tampawaddy) locates this site along the Myit ngeh in contrast with Berliet’s location on the Zaw Gyi River (2008: 197).

The ancient villages of the khayaing are not yet fully mapped but surveys over a number of years have documented pottery including wide bowls, globular jars with everted rims and cylindrical vessels with knobbed lids [Win Maung (Tampawaddy) 2000, 2010]. A globular cord-marked jar examined by the authors in December 2010 at Pa nan measured 60cm with spouted burnished libation jars (13cm) at Pa nan and other khayaing including Ta Mok like ones in the archaeological museum at Bagan and paintings in the Nandamannya temple, Bagan (Myint Aung 1986: 5, figs.)
Panlong Khayaing and Shwe-gu

While our focus is on the Ta Mok khayaing (21°38′N, 96°03′E) and newly uncovered Shwe-gu temple there, this is preceded by a summary of three other khayaing: Myin gon daing (21°30′N, 96°05′E), Pa nan (21°35′N, 96°04′E) and Kan Myuu (Kan lu) (21°45′N, 96°01′E). These illustrate the variable conditions of the remains, and the location of all the Shwe-gu except the Ta Mok temple, outside the khayaing fort walls. The profiles also highlight the exceptional succession of architecture being documented at the Ta Mok Shwe-gu.

Myin gon daing

Myin gon daing lies at the centre of the 11 khayaing with its pagoda sometimes called the “golden navel” of the rice fields. It is the largest of the khayaing walled sites and may have been a terminal node in the Pan Laung inter-change (Hendrickson 2007: 17; Berliet 2008b: 199). On the east bank of the Pan Laung with a clear in situ wall, it is the most distinct of the four sites described here. The interior of the khayaing fort wall is now filled with rice fields but has remains of three stupas and mounds scattered throughout the site (Berliet 2008b: 199). Surface finds include a Bagan period red plug earring (3.5cm long and tall, 3.3cm wide) and terracotta roof tiles. The site was mentioned in a number of chronicles and inscriptions of the Pinya to Myinzaing periods, with its first occurrence in inscriptions being AD 1198 (Berliet 2008b: 196). All that can be seen of the Shwe-gu of Myin gon daing, Kyet-ma Shwe-gu, is an eroded brick hill with a small stupa located to the southeast of the khayaing wall. As with most of the sites, there are a number of other stupas and monasteries scattered around the wall from various eras. The Thet-taw-ya stupa, for example, has Inwa period floral details in stucco remaining on the terraces of the stupa and the upper bell.

Pa nan

Only segments of the wall remain on the south side of the Pa nan khayaing fort. Numerous fragments of earthenware cups, pots and large bricks (46 x 25 x 3 cm) found on the east of the old city in new Pa Nan document earlier habitation. In 2004–5, a villager excavation of a square brick temple was overseen by the Department of Archaeology (Berliet 2008b: 198). Pa nan is mentioned in an inscription from AD 1198 with continued patronage about one hundred years ago in the southern monastery collection of images and an early Konbaung stupa as well as the Pa nan Shwe-gu-gyi, again outside the ancient fort wall. The temple has been renovated in recent years but shows evidence of its Bagan-era construction in its rounded arches. South of the Pa nan khayaing fort wall on the opposite bank of the Pan Laung is another temple, the Ma gyi daw Shwe-gu. Erosion has recently exposed the façade of a large Bagan period temple with finely detailed carving and floral details.

Kan lu

Little remains of the Kan lu khayaing fort wall, but a number of bricks (38 x 20 x 5 cm) have been found at the site. There are four villages of Kan lu today with one on the west bank and three on the east bank of the Pan Laung. It is mentioned, often as Kan Myuu, in seven inscriptions between 1211–1314 and later as Kha-Myuu, thought to derive from the numerous “ga” birds (partridge, /kha/) in the area. Just north of Kan lu gyi, “big Kan lu”, the most northerly of the three villages on the west bank is the Shwe-bon-tha pagoda. Recent renovation of the ordination hall yielded an oval shaped votive table (6.4 cm ht., 5 cm width) with the single image of the Buddha in the bhūmisparśa mudra flanked by two bell-shaped stupas typical of the Late Pyu (8th–10th century AD) period [Fig. 12.2]. The Wun pate Shwe-gu was restored in 2008 although the profile of the roof incline on the temple testifies to its Bagan period construction. To the north are the Shwe-gu-ni or red temple, and the Shwe-gu-hyauk or fully decorated temple. The nearby Saw ye Shwe-gu-gyi or Hpaya Nga-hsu-kyā-tin-gu (Five lotus pagodas) has an in situ 20-line inscription including the phrase “Shwe-gu-dayaka” or temple donor in reference to
Alaungsithu’s patronage. The temple, an additional small stupa, and other structures are surrounded by piles of old bricks adjacent to an isolated monastery with one resident monk.

As these brief details indicate, with the exception of Myin gon daing, the architecture of the Shwe-gu temples provides stronger evidence of antiquity and successive patronage than the khayaing walls. The current work at the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi, however, is the only temple of the Pan Laung located inside the khayaing fort wall and the only example where the Bagan period architecture has been fully uncovered.

Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi

The Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi temple lies within a monastery 1.34km east of the juncture of the Pan Laung and Samon Rivers in the midst of fields (80m msl) 10km northwest of Kyaukse. Two additional monasteries are located north and south of the old khayaing wall. To the north, on a road linking the village of Kyaung pan kon and Nyaung bin zaik, is the Ta Mok Taw Ya Kyaukse. Outside the southern khayaing fort wall is the small Shwe-mutaw stupa, with additional stupas exposed adjacent to this by construction for a gas pipeline. Close by, near the village of Ngeh-to is the Ngwe Twin Tu: Taw Ya, “silver well forest-monastery” with a damaged stone slab donated by the three “Shan” brothers while they were myosa or governors that mentions completion of donations to the ancient garden of Ta Mok in AD 1319.

The two-story Bagan Ta Mok temple was encased with a stupa begun in the reign of Pinya King Ussana and completed in the AD 1355–1362 reign of Hsin-phyuu-thakin Kyaw-swa-min-gyi. Ussana donated five fields, two male and two female temple slaves, and together with his Chief Queen made a royal pilgrimage from Inwa to Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi in a Pyi-gyi-kyet-thwa barge mentioned in the AD 1356 inscription stone erected to commemorate the visit. While the shape of the barge is not noted, royal craft were often constructed in the shape of auspicious animals such as the mythical karaweik bird or a double bodied naga and standing galon (garuda) (Htun Yi 1984). By AD 1915 the condition of the stupa had deteriorated, although U San Htwa donated a 6m high stupa [Fig. 12.3]. In 1993, Ashin Sandawbatha, native to Ngeh-to village, came to settle at Ta Mok, and while meditating inside an opening on the north side of the ruined 14th century Shwe-gu-gyi stupa, noticed layers of brick in the small cell. Word reached Win Maung (Tampawaddy), who visited the site in 1993 and has been working on the temple up to the present in collaboration with Ashin Sandawbatha. In 2008, the Department of Archaeology gave permission to dismantle the 14th century stupa, and by 2010 a two-story north-facing temple covered in stucco had been unearthed [Fig. 12.4]. This and other structures at Ta Mok are dated here on stylistic grounds including the brickwork, arches, images of the Buddha and thrones and decoration as set out in the table below [Table 12.2] and shown in the sketches of the temple complex plan [Figs. 12.5 and 12.6].
Fig. 12.3: Ta Mok in 1992 [Photo: U Win Maung (Tampawaddy)].

Fig. 12.4: East façade Ta Mok in 2010 (Photo: Sithu, Ta Mok Project).
Fig. 12.5: Ta Mok temple complex: (1) Two small gu on southwest; (2) thein (ordination hall) with sima (●); and inscription (■); (3) Two-story temple; (4) Ta-wa-gu temple; (5) Zayat foundation; (6) Stucco-mixing tank; (7) Naung-taw-ghi stupa; (8) Square structure with ums; (9) 14th century AD stupa wall; (10) 11th–12th century AD wall; (11) 14th century AD wall [Drawing: Win Maung (Tampawaddy) and E. Moore].

Fig. 12.6: Plan of central structures (Drawing: Cho Zaw Min).
Gu and thein

Among the many buildings that have been unearthed since 2008 are two east-west facing single-chamber gu that were encased within the southwest corner of the 14th century stupa. The outermost image of the Buddha (45cm ht.) in the west-facing gu has been reworked — the nose and mouth can be attributed to the 12th century but the smooth head without curls or usnisa suggests the 13th century. Excavation of the throne has unearthed two earlier thrones although the encased images have not been uncovered. In the space between the back walls of the two gu, evidence of timber has been recovered from post-holes. In the east gu are three encased images, successive thrones and floor levels [Fig. 12.7]. The inner image is Gupta-influenced, stylistically dated to the 11th century AD with partial excavation and repair leaving the face of this image visible at chest level of a 12th century AD encasing Pala style image (1.5m ht.). The outermost image is datable to the 13th century late Bagan period. All three sit on a common double lotus throne, each higher and slightly forward. This type of lotus throne carved from bricks can be seen on the inner throne of Kyauk Saga (IMP 1029). It

Table 12.2: Buildings unearthed in the Ta Mok temple complex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Stylistic date begun</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Width (m)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two small gu Southwest</td>
<td>late 11th century</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>total length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thein</td>
<td>late 11th century</td>
<td>21.75</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>total length multiple additions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Two-story temple central</td>
<td>12th–13th century</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>width widest point; door jamb east side 1.70m below ground level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zayat foundation Southwest</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Inner structure offset 1.26 (W); 1.18 (S); 1.0 (N); 0.54 (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ta-wa-gu temple Southeast</td>
<td>12th–13th century</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>width widest point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stucco mixing tank East</td>
<td>14th century</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>in complex of additional walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Naung-taw-gyi temple Northeast</td>
<td>10th–12th century</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.9 on east smaller end; 1.95m below ground level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Square structure with urns Northeast</td>
<td>8th–10th century</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>measured on west and north; 2.26m below ground level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 12.7: Three encased images in east-facing gu, Ta Mok (Photo: Sithu, Ta Mok Project).
was common in the reign of Anawrahta but unusually, it is made with stucco at Shwe-gu-gyi. Terracotta snail-shell shaped hair curls were recovered from the images, each moulded and attached to a slightly hardened layer of stucco on the head.\(^7\)

The *thein* is a rectangular structure facing to the west with three large images the Buddha set against the back wall. The width of the crossed legs has been used to estimate the height of the images, ca. 7.2, 14.8 and 7.2m. The central and flanking throne bases again suggest 11th or early 12th century construction while a third throne layer is probably 13th century renovation.\(^8\) A black stone *simā* (104cm ht., 35cm wide) was found outside the west wall of the *thein*. Two additional *simā* stones have been unearthed under westward extensions of the *thein*. One is an eroded octagonal *simā* (now 44cm ht.) made of marble dated to the Pinya period and another an hexagonal shaped *simā* (63cm ht.) of grey stand stone with floral design of the late Bagan period (13th century AD). Excavation of the *thein* has revealed three phases: a brick platform with post-holes indicating a wooden superstructure, a brick structure overlying the platform and a third renovation, probably in the 15th century, extending the structure to the west. Red and white painted pot sherds recovered from the floor of the lowest throne recall ones from the lowest layer of the small east-west facing *gu*, similar to those found in the excavations of the palace attributed to Anawrahta at Bagan.

The Two-Story Temple

The north-facing two story-temple was erected just north of the small east-west oriented *gu*. There are six entrances with a north entry hall and central pillar flanked by four images of the Buddha: Birth on the west, Enlightenment on the north, First Sermon on the east and Demise of the Buddha on the south.\(^9\)

The largest in *bhūmisparśa* mudra rests against the north face of the central pillar, with altogether 22 images (2.25–40cm ht.). Eighteen, five in *dhyāni* mudra and the others in *bhūmisparśa* mudra are set in niches set inside the entrances and inner corners. On the upper level, images of the Buddha flanking the central pillar follow the same plan. The images probably date to a late 12th century renovation, a change indicated by the earlier rounded style of arch on the lower story versus the later more pointed style of the upper story arches. Much of interior has been periodically renovated although there are traces of painting on the upper and lower story and a painted inscription dated to AD 1322 on the upper part of a door arch on the upper side of the lower story.

Some elements of the temple such as the encasement of *gu* with a stupa and the stucco *jatakās* are not found at Bagan while other elements of the architecture and decoration are similar. For example, the flaring *saing-paung* or ox-haunches flanking the central doorway are more tightly angled (circa 15°) rather than the more usual 30° outward cant of the Bagan *saing-paung*. However, the redented corners create a profile similar to that at the Sulamani (AD 1183, IMP 748) (Pichard 1994). The overall plan of the temple resembles several at Bagan including the Gu-ni (north, IMP 766), the Sein-nyet-ama (IMP 1085) and the Gu-taw-thit-hpaya (IMP 1486) (Pichard 1994, 1996). The most notable element of the two-story temple is the detailed stucco work which covers the exterior surface. One example is seen in three-dimensional crowned royal guardian figures, *lokapala* or *Nat-min-gyi*, on the upper story. Similar (repaired) figures are also found at the Dhammayazika (AD 1196, no. 937, IMP 947) although these no longer have heads or the ornamental details seen at Ta Mok (Pichard 1985: pl. 27–28; 1994–6). The shoulders of the Ta Mok figures indicate that the arms were held in the *anjali* or respect and offering posture, possibly an elite *deva* [Fig. 12.8]. Four are seen on each side of the temple with two on the middle terrace and two on the uppermost terrace.

The fine stucco work on the two-story temple is also evident in the pediments and tympanums over the doors of Ta Mok *Shwe-gu-gyi*. The south tympanum depicts a *galon* standing on the head of a crowned *naga-min* with two additional naga draped around him. Below is a seated figure of the fertility goddess Sri, hands grasping floral strands curling up from two *nget-hsin* or elephant-birds below. A similar image is seen on the east tympanum, raised on a lotus pedestal above the doorway arch with a large *kirtimukha*. The north pediment, recently recovered, is also different. It appears to have been removed when the outer wall of Ussana’s 14th century stupa cut through the north face of the earlier temple. During 2011, the fallen pediment was found face-down and carefully covered with hardened mud in front of the *Naung-
taw-gyi temple northeast of the two-story temple. The pediment has now been cleaned and is placed near the two-story temple’s north entry [Fig. 12.9]. The central part depicts a seated lion with his mouth open, tongue extended, and an erect sexual organ. He sits on the heads of three elephants, with a seated crowned figure above, possibly a kinnari, deva or galon. Devas, lions and floral elements fill the flame elements that flank the centre. This energized iconography is also seen in standing ogres or bilu at corner junctions of the temple with one hand erect grasping a stout club, some with erect sexual organs and large protruding tongues.

On the upper level are stucco reliefs (ca. 10 x 15cm) of the first 108 of the 550 jatakas, the previous lives of the Buddha. Eight jatakas (nos. 54–61) were not included, and 24 are eroded, but 76 scenes remain in situ. Win Maung (Tampawaddy) suggests that additional reliefs may once have existed at the base of the temple recalling the architecture of the Ananda pagoda at Bagan but that these were destroyed in the encasement of the two-story temple. Identifying inscriptions in Myanmar are seen below the scenes although the names of the Bodhisattvas are in Pali. Stucco jataka scenes and writing in stucco have not been documented at Bagan. In addition, some scenes such as the Kandina (Kannina) Jataka (no. 13) have not been recorded at Bagan. The story is a lesson on the perils of love, simply depicted at Ta Mok with three figures: the Bodhisattva is shown as a tree spirit observing a mountain-stag who left the safety of the forest to accompany a doe, with whom he had fallen in love, back to her village. In the story, the doe sensed the hunters lying in wait and let the stag go first and he was killed with a single arrow. In the scene the hunter is shown with his arrow killing the fallen stag before cooking the flesh and carrying the carcass on a pole back to his children (Cowell 1895) [Fig. 12.10]. The jataka scenes appear to have been carefully protected or enshrined when the 14th century AD Pinya period stupa was built. For example, during its removal in 2008, the inner two-story temple was found ...
to have been coated with approximately 2.5cm of hardened mud. Seventy votive tablets described below were also found embedded in the mud coating. The eroded scenes may well have been damaged therefore by the time of the stupa’s construction.

In addition to the pediments and tympanums noted above, stucco covers the surface on all the lower exterior walls of the temple. The longer east and west sides of the temple are covered with a *marabein* or screen design such as seen in mural paintings at Bagan. The *marabein* have multiple roundels arranged in rows, with figures of *deva*, animals and mythical creatures and floral patterns (*kanote-pan*). One panel
of 15 roundels on the east side depicts a seated deva at the centre, with lions above and below, deer to the right and left, and the other ten roundels with various birds [Fig. 12.11]. Twelve types of mythical birds, many in pairs, some erect with others shown prone, have been identified on the temple walls. They include the mythical lun-kyin intensely devoted to its mate and seen on royal barges, and the nget-hsin or elephant bird, a roc-like creature with a proboscis also known as the hiti-hlaing-ka from the Pali hatti-lain-ga or hattilinka. There are also elephants, horses, hintha (hamsa, Brahminy duck), peacocks, egrets, owls, doves, hens, monkeys, human and nat figures, flower blossoms and buds. On the upper and lower story, upturned sein-htaung depict intertwined birds and lotus buds, two deer and a wheel of law (dhamma-cakra), chinthe and human and nat figures. There is a galon on top of a triple naga on a side-arch recalling stucco work at Kusinara (IMP 1266) and a pentagonal stupa (IMP 1410) east of Mingalazeidi at Bagan. Various figures fill diamond-shaped triangles (Sein-htaung-kyun), roundels on the main walls and sides of the doorway (tekkadan-pan) and the moat-pan or main arch. While there are some stucco roundels Bagan, for example on sikhara of the Bochymon Gubyauk (IMP 995), most parallels at Bagan and in the Pinya period such as at Shwe-gu-Oo-min caves (21°35’N, 96°12’E) east of Kyaukse are paintings on the interior of temples.

On the upper corners of the temple double-bodied mythical lions (chinthe) can be seen with one body stretched along each side of the corner. The creatures’ heads are in place, tufted mane and decorative swirls on the rounded hindquarters; the faces animated and ears erect. Similar chinthe are seen on the corners of a temple near Mingalazeidi (IMP 1410) although there, the head is missing. On the corners below the chinthe, are large bilu or ogre heads similar to ones at Sulamani temple (IMP 748) at Bagan. Also on the upper corner elements are 16 alms bowls (thabelik-nyaunk) with a cup-shaped bell (khaung-laung). These lack the usual “belt” around the middle of the bell but have a row of small pearls and a bottom edge of upturned lotus petals. Above the layers of the rings (phaung-yit) are rounded horizontal bands and upper tiers or Hsat-ta-wa-li (chattravali). Each is surmounted by a lotus bud finial and set on a square pedestal decorated with eight upturned rounded diamond shapes (sein-htaung-waing), floral details and bilu. As these notes highlight, the stucco work is detailed, filling the surface with a wide array of zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and floral motifs.

**Iconography and Orientation**

There are multiple ways in which one can engage with the newly uncovered two-story temple. The interior provides quiet meditational and ritual spaces, its figures evoking a devotional quiet suspended from the animation of the exterior. When walking clockwise around the temple, the gaze is continuously drawn along the spaces prompting completion of a pilgrim circuit or pradakshina. Iconic profiles of the alms bowls, the Nat-min-gyi and the motifs filling the balanced rectangles and curves of the temple offer different planes of visual interaction (Pinney 2010: 191).

Any overall significance in the iconographic scheme and orientation of the two-story temple remains open to discussion. The north orientation of the two-story temple is popularly related to Htwe-t-yat-lan or Htwe-pauk method and practice. The term is commonly linked to veneration of Maitreya, the future Buddha, also weikza and “going out” from rebirth through supernatural means including lead and iron alchemy, graphic diagrams (in) and medicinal practices (Myanmar Language Commission 1993: 207; Than Swe 2004: 20–1; Rozenberg 2010: 51, 162, fn. 7). The multiple depictions of mythical and actual animals on the exterior of the stucco-covered temple are unusual, suggesting local and perhaps forest-dwelling preferences. The variation also recalls accounts that said the Ari moved east from Bagan to the “Shan” areas around Kyaukse where Mahayana practices were well established [Burma Gazetteer Kyaukse 1925: 10–1; Phayre 1998 (1883): 22, 33]. Questions about the Ari are only part of the story, however, for Mayayana, esoteric, Brahmanic and animist practices commonly intersected at Bagan (Bode 1965: 16–8; Than Tun 1988: 43). Earlier sects, dating to the 4th century AD, included not only multiple Theravada traditions, but Mahayana, Buddhist tantra and Brahmanism (Pranke 2004: 18, fn. 57). While conjectural given the ongoing work at the site, it is this sense of multiple traditions often separated by terms such as Theravada, Mahayana and esoteric that may be reflected in the orientation and iconography of the two-story temple at Ta Mok.
Other Structures at Ta Mok

In addition to the small gu, two-story temple, stupa and thein, a number of other structures have been unearthed in the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi compound. South of the thein on the west side described above, excavation in 2010–11 has unearthed the square brick foundations of a wooden zayat. The undated structure has two enclosures, an inner, probably earlier, one and a second outer enclosure with four staircases, one on each side.

Four structures have been excavated on the east of the two-story temple, named by Win Maung (Tampawaddy) in conjunction with the Ta Mok Sayadaw. To the south-east of the main temple is a single-entrance or Ta-wa-gu (“one entry”) stupa with two foundation or floor levels. A finely carved andagu (15cm) has been recovered within a layered cavity on the south side of this structure [Fig. 12.12].

- The andagu shows the Parinivāna on the top and the Enlightenment at the centre flanked in clockwise order from the bottom left by the Nativity, the Great Miracle, the Descent from Tāvatimsa, the Taming of Nālāgiri Elephant, the First Sermon and the Pārileyyaka Retreat.

Fig. 12.12: Andagu from Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi (Photo: E. Moore).

- At the base of the arched surround or takeh, a standing Bodhisattva flanks both sides with small figures of the army of Mara filling the upper portion of the takeh.

- The image of the Buddha is held aloft by two naga in human form (Naga-luu-lin).

- Under this at the bottom of andagu are a mythical lion and elephant head and the seven gems of a Chakravartin (e.g., the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Gem, the Woman, the Housefather and the Advisor).

North of the Tā-wa-gu stupa is a north-south rectangular structure with a single opening on the north provisionally identified as a stucco-mixing tank. Again to the north is the four-entry stupa Naung-taw-gyi stupa with images of the Buddha facing to the four directions. The structure is oriented to the west with four layers attributed to the colonial period, Narapatisithu, Anawrahta and a pre-Bagan phase with multiple ash and bone foundation deposits at the same depth at the foundation of the “Pyu” square structure to the north described below. Other deposits of bone and tuff-like slag have been found to the south of Naung-taw-gyi stupa.

North of the Naung-taw-gyi stupa is a square structure with two enclosures. There is a staircase on the west and a west entry to the inner structure. Around the exterior wall, three urns have been found on the southeast, northeast and northwest. From the style of the urns and the condition of the bones, Win Maung (Tampawaddy) provisionally dates them to the Late Pyu period circa 9th–10th century AD. He suggests that the building was rebuilt in the later Bagan period on a foundation similar to 2nd–9th century AD Pyu sites such as Beikthano’s KKG-4 where a number of urns have been recovered. A large quantity of pottery typical of the Pyu period has been recovered around the square structure. Along the
same north line of the temple complex a cache of thin (2mm) hard glossy burnished black ware was found, tentatively identified as a begging bow. The sherds are similar to pieces found at the Bronze Age cemetery of Nyaungan and HL26 at Halin [Aung Mon, Win Maung (Tampawaddy), pers. comm., August 2011].

Votive Tablets

Four types of tablets have been found under the central image of the thein on the west and the temple surrounds. These are described in detail since they have slight departures from the usual iconography and to allow comparison with other tablets.

- Four tablets (14–15cm in ht., 10cm width and 2cm thick) provisionally dated to the 11th–13th century AD shows a seated single image of the Buddha in the centre in bhūmisparśa mudrā surrounded by depictions of the eight scenes of the life of the Buddha. The central image is surmounted by a takeh or surround, with tall flame-like projections shown in front of a four-tiered pyat-that and behind that, the upper fronds of a bodhi tree [Fig. 12.13]. The use of the flames on the takeh is a unique decorative device not seen at Bagan but the images of the Buddha resemble a tablet in the Bagan museum dated to the 13th century AD (Htwe Htwe Win 2007).
- The Parinivāna scene is at the top of the tablet, with the large Enlightenment at the centre. The other scenes, moving from the lower right in a counter-clockwise direction, are the Nativity, the Pārileyyaka Retreat, the First Sermon, the Descent from Tāvatimsa, the Taming of the Nāḷāgiri Elephant and the Great Miracle.
- The Parinivāna scene shows the reclining Buddha framed in a decorated bed flanked by two small relic caskets (kalaśa pot) or stūpas and small lotus flowers with four small stūpas at the apex of the tablet.
- The Nativity shows Māyā in semi tribhanga pose, grasping a tree branch with her left arm around Pajāpatī’s shoulder while the Buddha sits on the lotus coming from her right side. On one of the tablets, the lower garments of Māyā and her sister bear large roundels.
- The Pārileyyaka Retreat scene shows the Buddha sideways but with His face turned to the front. The elephant is shown behind him while the monkey is standing and offering honey rice to the Buddha.
- The Enlightenment scene depicts the seated Buddha with the Vajrāsana (Diamond throne) on top of the Padmāsana (Lotus throne).
- The Great Miracle illustrates a seated Buddha in dhamacakra mudrā on a lotus throne with small seated Buddhas or stupas on each side.
- The Descent from Tāvatim Hsa depicts the standing Buddha in varada mudrā with Sāriputta on his right but not the usual depiction of Brahmā on the other side.
- The Taming of the Nāḷāgiri Elephant scene has the standing Buddha in Abhaya mudrā with a standing disciple behind him and the crouched elephant in front of him.
Two lines of Pali are written at the bottom of this tablet, a type not found in Mya’s 1961 votive tablet compendium. The writing is the blessing (Hsu-taung-sar) roughly translated as “By the making of this votive tablet may it help [me] to get the wisdom of knowing all things”. A similar tablet found by Bo Kay had the same verse but in Mon rather than the Pali language. The language variation plus the flame-like projections suggest later production, but the dating of the tablet remains open to discussion for it can also be interpreted as local conservatism far from the centre.

There are additional tablets with a single image of the Buddha dated to the 11th century.

• Two tablets show the Buddha in a standing posture on a lotus under a trefoil arch. The left hand is pendant in varada mudrā and the right raised at breast level in mahākārunika mudrā. On each side of the tablet is a pair of bell shape stupas with the smaller one above a larger somewhat elongated one. The space below is filled with two small bell shape stupas, making up a total of eight stupas surrounding the central image of the Buddha.

• Two other tablets depict the Buddha in bhūmisparśa mudrā seated cross legged with the left leg above the right (Paryankasana) on a double lotus throne under a trefoil arch topped by an umbrella. The branches of a Bodhi tree are on each side of an umbrella with traces of a two line Pali inscription below the throne. Parallel examples from Bagan bear an inscription on the reverse noting they were donated by a higher village official or Ka-lan-than-byin-min [Mya (Thiripyanchi) 1961, vol. 1: figs. 78–80].

• A third group of single-image tablets is made up of 70 small (5cm ht., 3cm width) tablets, all probably stamped from the same mould and dated to the Pinya period. As noted above, they were found on the upper part of the stupa embedded in the clay coating put on the two-story temple when the 14th century stupa was constructed. The tablets show the Buddha seated in bhūmisparśa mudrā on a double lotus throne under a trefoil arch topped by an umbrella. The branches of a Bodhi tree can be seen on each side of the umbrella although they are more stylized than the 11th-century tablets. There are in addition five bell shaped stupas on either side of tablet.

In summary, tablets provisionally dated to the 11th–14th century AD have been documented at the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi from excavation of temples and an ordination hall. While for the most part paralleled by examples from Bagan and Pinya, iconographic details of an inscribed tablet and the embedding of the 14th century tablets on the upper part of the two-story Shwe-gu-gyi temple suggest local custom and preferences.

Conclusion

The nine Shwe-gu temples along the Pan Laung mark out local paths of religious and social pilgrimage, with evidence from the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi temple indicating ritual use by at least ca. the 9th–10th century AD. From the 11th century AD, the Bagan economy spawned a new and more global modernity in the institutionalization of the seven Pan Laung khayaing. Ongoing work at the two-story Shwe-gu-gyi, the only instance where the Shwe-gu is inside the fort wall, brings the khayaing and Shwe-gu traditions together. Motifs of fertility and celebration on the lower story of the temple are complemented by jatakas on the upper story and images of the Buddha on the four sides of both upper and lower stories. Other structures in the temple compound are provisionally dated to the 11th–13th century, with donations also made in the early 20th century.

While the 11 khayaing may have been by-products of the court’s zeal for agricultural and trade buffers, the architecture of the Pan Laung Shwe-gu indicates that they also heightened pre-existing local patronage traditions. This local context is often constricted in a centre-periphery framework, a one-way discourse that easily reduces the art of the periphery to a passive product of the centre. We have highlighted the uniqueness of the Ta Mok Shwe-gu-gyi in an effort to re-dress the implication of simplicity in such imitation with the complexity of the Pan Laung architecture and economy. In a rapidly changing region such as Kyaukse, the Shwe-gu and khayaing traditions offer a means of sustaining the intangible place of the past for the communities of today. In this context, they offer an innovative framework for defining the local archaeology of villages throughout Upper Myanmar.
Notes
2. Rice production in Lower Burma increased substantially only after the widening of international trade with colonial rule of the delta. From an average acreage of 66,000 acres in 1830, for example, in 1930, 9,720 acres of paddy were grown in Lower Burma. While production also widened in Upper Burma, the acreage never equalled that of the delta. Figures rise, for example, from 1,196 acres in 1890 when British reports become available, to 2,367 acres in 1930 (Siok-Hwa 1968: 25).
3. Narapatisithu was also said to have constructed the stone weir that the Ta mok canal joined (Burma Gazeteer 1925: 15).
5. No local derivation or meaning for the name “Pa nan” has yet been found [Win Maung (Tampawaddy) 2000].
6. In addition to the Ma gyi daw Shwe-gu mentioned in the text, evidence of Bagan period architecture is seen at Thindaung on the Zaw Gyi River (Berliet 2008b: 197).
7. At the Shwe-zi-gon pagoda at Tagaung dated to Anawrahta’s period, numerous images of the Buddha with similar snail-shell shaped hair curls were found.
8. A similar theri is found in the Sule group at Bagan and at the Kya hsin temple south of Myinkaba a row of three images dated to Anawrahta’s period has been recorded.
9. The more common form is to depict the Birth on the north, Enlightenment on the east, First Sermon on the south and reclining Buddha on the west.

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